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SUBJECT: MONTHLY UNSC MIDEAST DEBATE: CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM FOR
FALL INTL MEETING

REF: USUN 685

¶1. (U) Summary. During a seven-hour monthly UNSC debate on the Middle East on August 29 featuring over 30 speakers, UNSCO Michael Williams professed "guarded optimism" about recent developments in the Arab-Israeli peace process but was decidedly downcast about the reality on the ground. Amb Wolff led several other delegates in calling for establishment of the rule of law in the Palestinian territories and in calling for the full implementation of all UNSC resolutions, including those on Lebanon. Most delegations expressed cautious optimism about the U.S.-sponsored international meeting in the fall of 2007, but warned that it must register meaningful progress on final status issues and be as inclusive as possible. Delegates were split on whether to push for Hamas-Fatah reconciliation.

Israel, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Observer exchanged familiar attacks but also evinced hope for the Abbas-Olmert dialogue and the upcoming international meeting. Israel took exception to Indonesia's reference to the "Israeli invasion of Lebanon" in 2006 and to the Lebanese PR's attempt to draw an equivalence between abducted IDF soldiers and Lebanese prisoners in Israel. Iran and Syria, joined at times by Cuba, excoriated Israel for its "war crimes" and directly criticized the U.S. for supporting Israel in the UNSC. End Summary.

¶2. (U) The UN Security Council held a monthly debate on the Middle East on 29 August 2007. UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO) Michael Williams briefed on the situation in Israel, the Palestinian territories, and Lebanon. Following interventions by all fifteen Council members, Israel, Palestine, and Lebanon delivered statements. Eleven other UN delegations, including Syria, Iran, Portugal (as the EU President), Yemen (representing the Arab Group), Algeria, Vietnam, Pakistan (on behalf of the OIC), Cuba (representing the NAM) and Japan, also spoke. At the request of Qatar, this month's meeting was open to all interested delegations. A summary and full transcript of the meeting can be found on the UN website at: [www.un.org/news/press/docs//2007/sc9108.doc.h tm](http://www.un.org/news/press/docs//2007/sc9108.doc.htm)

UNSCO Williams Says Farewell

¶3. (U) In his final briefing before leaving his UNSCO post in September 2007, Michael Williams professed "guarded optimism" about recent developments towards peace in the Middle East, including the Abbas-Olmert talks, the appointment of Tony Blair as Quartet representative, and President Bush's call for an international meeting in the fall. While welcoming discussions between Abbas and Olmert, Williams said the talks "should shift gear to obtain concrete assurances" on final status issues, and expressed hope that the international meeting in the fall would feature "meaningful discussion" of these same issues. Encouraging the "widest possible attendance" at the international meeting, Williams noted

Syrian commitments to the Middle East peace process and the Arab League peace initiative. Turning briefly to Lebanon, Williams reiterated points from the Secretariat's August 16 briefing (reftel). He underscored the SYG's support for presidential elections in conformity with Lebanon's constitution, noted modest reductions in Israeli overflights but called on the GOI to end the practice altogether, and reiterated the UN's request to Israel for strike data on its use of cluster bombs in Lebanon.

14. (U) In contrast to his optimism about developments in the peace process, Williams was downbeat when describing the reality on the ground. Although PA Prime Minister Fayyad had registered initial progress instituting much-needed reforms, the ongoing split between the West Bank and Gaza remains a cause for "deep concern." Williams emphasized that Hamas was operating in Gaza outside the rule of law and cited credible reports of human rights abuses there. But he said continued closure of crossing points into the coastal strip had brought the economy there to a near halt. Underscoring the "essential" need to ease the closures, Williams said UN policy in Gaza is to oppose collective punishment, address suffering in Gaza as a means to combat extremism, and work towards a political reunification of the West Bank and Gaza. Turning to security responsibilities of the Palestinians, Williams bemoaned continuing rocket fire into Israel and smuggling of arms into Gaza. He also decried continuing Israeli settlement activity and noted the GOI had taken "no credible action" to remove settlement outposts.

U.S. Leads Call to Build PA Institutions

15. (U) Several delegations joined USUN in calling for

USUN NEW Y 00000717 002 OF 003

increased focus on ensuring the rule of law and security in Gaza and the West Bank. Underscoring that the Abbas/Fayyad government can be a partner for peace, Amb Wolff noted U.S. assistance to the PA to reform its security services, and condemned Hamas for its illegal occupation of Gaza and provision of safe haven to fellow terrorist organizations there. Recalling President Bush's July 16 speech, he described U.S. plans for an international meeting in the fall of 2007 of countries that support a two-state solution, reject violence, recognize Israel's right to exist, and commit to all previous agreements among the parties. He welcomed continuing dialogue between the parties, the Quartet and Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meetings in New York in September, and recommendations from Tony Blair following his visit to the region on the economic and institutional agenda for the Quartet. Amb Wolff also briefly touched on Lebanon, calling for full implementation of UNSCR 1701 and on Syria and Iran to honor their commitments under that resolution. The new UK PermRep, John Sawers, focused on Blair's role in building Palestinian institutions and economy. The French DPR called on the PA to exercise its authority throughout its territory and to "mercilessly" combat terrorism. Even the Russian DPR called on the PA to uphold its obligations by fighting terror.

Cautious Optimism for Fall 2007 Int'l Meeting

16. (U) Most delegations expressed cautious optimism about the U.S.-sponsored international meeting in the fall of 2007. (Note: Several referred to it as a conference. End Note.) Most delegations, however, warned that the meeting must register meaningful progress on final status issues between the parties and should be as "inclusive" in its guest list as possible. Qatar said it expected real results from the meeting, "unlike previous ones." Russia cautioned that the event should "not relaunch the Middle East Peace Process," whose terms of reference are already clear, and should include Lebanon and Syria. France called for the meeting to launch an "authentic process" through which the international

community would give guarantees to secure agreements between the parties. Italy said it looked forward to details of the conference, but welcomed it as a sign of U.S. commitment to the MEPP. Calling on the UNSC to play a "more active role" in the MEPP, China said it also expects new initiatives from the Quartet to advance the peace process. Syria maintained that any international conference ought to be clearly defined with precise terms of reference and objectives. The event would also need to provide the necessary guarantees of respect for international resolutions and the recovery of Arab land.

----- Hamas-Fatah: Conciliation or Confrontation?

17. (U) Delegates were split on whether the international community ought to shun Hamas for its takeover of Gaza and support Fatah wholeheartedly or to encourage rapprochement between the two Palestinian groups. While the U.S., UK, Portugal (on behalf of the EU), and Peru joined the Palestinian delegate in calling for full support for the Abbas/Fayyad government, other delegates adopted a more cautious tone. Arguing that dialogue between Fatah and Hamas is "critical to moving forward," Indonesia warned that international support "should not broaden" the split between the two groups. Russia lamented the "de facto" dual authority that exists in the Palestinian territories and emphasized there could be "no alternative" to Palestinian unity. Norway, while supporting PM Fayyad's efforts to normalize the situation on the ground, argued that comprehensive and lasting peace "cannot be achieved through isolating a major popular movement." Cuba, speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), surprised some delegates by condemning the "criminal actions that were carried out in the Gaza strip" and calling for the restoration of the situation in Gaza that existed prior to recent events. Iran noted Hamas's victory in "free, fair, and democratic elections" to argue that "efforts by any faction in Palestine" to exclude it are doomed to fail.

----- Parties Hopeful Amid Mutual Recrimination

18. (U) Although they engaged each other in a rancorous debate, Israel, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Observer also interspersed their interventions with hope for the future based on recent developments in the peace process. Palestinian Observer Riyad Mansour excoriated Israel for its "continued violations" of international law through military raids, settlement building, and the construction of the separation barrier in the occupied Palestinian territories.

USUN NEW Y 00000717 003 OF 003

But he also welcomed the Abbas-Olmert talks, plans for an international conference -- which "could be transformed to be under the auspices of the UN" -- and the relaunching of the Arab Peace Initiative. Lebanese PR Nawaf Salam lambasted Israel for its overflights of Lebanon, "continuing violation of UNSCR 425 through its occupation of the Sheba'a Farms," and its unwillingness to settle the "long-standing issue" of Lebanese prisoners detained in Israel. He passionately decried Israel's refusal to provide cluster bomb strike data and announced his government's support for efforts to ban cluster bombs worldwide. Israeli PR Gillerman praised recent talks between Abbas and Olmert and described Israeli efforts to bolster the PA, but castigated the continuing terror attacks from "Hamastan." He took exception both to Indonesia's reference to "Israel's invasion of Lebanon," noting that Hizballah had started the war by abducting two Israeli soldiers, and to the Lebanese PR's attempt to draw an equivalence between the IDF captives and Lebanese prisoners in Israel.

----- Iran and Syria Strike Discordant Notes

19. (U) Iran and Syria, joined at times by Cuba in its capacity as NAM Chair, delivered speeches starkly at odds with the majority of hopeful, forward-looking interventions given by other delegates. Iran criticized the "Israeli war machine" for its ceaseless "crimes" against the "defenseless Palestinian people" and lamented the UNSC's failure to address these issues because of the "unqualified support" rendered to Israel by the U.S. Syria leveled similar accusations against Israel, and charged that it continues its "terror campaign" with the support of "powers that promote democracy." Syria and Iran both paid particular attention to reports of an Israeli nuclear weapons capability. Recalling PM Olmert's statement to this effect to a German TV station in December 2006, Iran called on the UNSC to take "urgent and decisive action" to pressure this "state terror" regime to relinquish its nuclear weapons and submit to international monitoring. Syria also decried recent IDF maneuvers in the Golan Heights, testifying to Israel's interest in "provoking a new war" and increasing tensions along the border.

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